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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Friday, October 19, 1934.

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "Preserving Pears." Information from the Bureau of Plant Industry and the Bureau of Home Economics, U.S.D.A.

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We Americans have the reputation for being a nation of fruit eaters. But a friend of mine who has lived abroad for some years tells me that there's one fruit we don't appreciate as the Europeans do. That's the pear. In England, in France, in Belgium and Germany pears are far more popular and highly prized than over here. My friend recalls especially how startled he was when he first saw some wonderful pears from the Isle of Jersey on sale in a London market for more than seventy dollars a dozen. Only a few of these fine Jersey pears can grow on one tree. And he says each one is treated as if it were worth its weight in gold. In the South of Europe centuries ago the people devised a method of keeping their pears over the winter. They dry and smoke them. The hard, black and wrinkled product keeps indefinitely, of course. It wouldn't appeal much to our appetites, but over there the people use these dry pears stewed and even in soups.

The pear seems to return the compliment that the Europeans pay it. It isn't a rugged fruit, and gives every evidence of preferring the equable climate of the Continent to our sudden and extreme changes in weather. In California, where pears thrive so well, the climate is more like that in the Old World. Over here, too, pear trees suffer various ills that don't bother them much abroad, particularly the pear blight which has killed so many of our trees.

Perhaps the pear simply likes to live in the midst of older civilizations because its line goes so far back into history. You know, early Greek writings mention this fruit and Roman emperors feasted on it. I've been told that there are now 5,000 varieties of pears in Europe but I can't check on that figure. The scientists I've talked to mention about a thousand varieties, ranging all the way from the small Seckel pear, that we use for spicing and pickling, to the large, sweet, yellow Bartlett, our favorite for table use. Pears in this country are either of European stock or they are hybrids -- European combined with the ornamental Chinese or sand pear. The Bartlett and the Anjou have come to us from across the Atlantic and grow chiefly on the Pacific Coast. The Kieffer and the Le Conte, which grow in the East and South principally, have both Chinese and European ancestors.

But no matter what the variety, one interesting and unusual characteristic seems to distinguish all pears. Their flavor is better if they ripen indoors instead of on the tree. So gather your pears when they have developed fully in

size and shape and when they have just begun to color, but before they start to soften. At this stage you can hold them a long time in cold storage. Then, when you want to ripen them, you can bring them out into a moderately warm room, spread them out on trays or tables, each one separate from the others, and protect them from chilly air currents. They'll soon ripen with a delicious flavor. Be careful not to have the room too warm. That often causes pears to rot in the center yet show no sign from the outside.

And speaking of the value of storage, let me tell you what experts at the Bureau of Plant Industry have discovered about storing one of our common varieties of pears -- the Kieffer. The reason this pear grows so widely in the East and South is that it resists the pear blight which ruins most other varieties in this section. Unfortunately, the hardy Kieffer doesn't have all the virtues. In flavor it has never compared with the Bartlett, for example. And it is a harder pear. That has cut down its popularity. Just recently the scientists have found that the taste and texture of the Kieffer improves tremendously if you store it a couple of weeks before you use it. The storing breaks down the hardness and gives better flavor to preserves and canned fruit. This discovery may bring the Kieffer into its own, especially for canning and preserving.

The scientists say that merely storing isn't enough. You must have the right temperature -- from 60 to 65 degrees F., no more and no less. You won't have much trouble getting this temperature in your storage cellar at this time of year. Take your thermometer down and test the atmosphere. You'll probably find that it registers pretty close to requirement right now. If the room is a little cold, you can warm it up with a lamp or lantern. If it's too warm, give it a little more ventilation from the window.

The experts also say that you can gather your mature Kieffer pears and keep them in cold storage at 32 degrees F. for as long as two months. After cold storage, they will need about 16 days at the temperature of 60 to 65 degrees to ripen and be ready for canning or preserving. You see what a convenient canning fruit the pear happens to be. When you're rushed with other fruits, you don't have to worry about your pears, at least. You can store them away and let them wait until a more convenient season. They'll wait patiently if you put them in the right temperature -- and they'll improve by waiting.

Be sure never to overcook pears. That spoils their color.

Well, canning or making plain preserves are only two of the many ways to put up pears. Pears also make delicious conserve with other fruits like apples and quinces and lemons. They're good pickled. They're delicious made into ginger pears. They also make fine ginger chips -- thin slices preserved in a ginger sirup. They also make marmalade and spicy pear butter.

For dessert use, use the fresh pears baked -- either plain or stuffed, and stewed and jellied in a fruit gelatin mixture.

